

What is motivation?

According to Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary "motivation" is defined as a "a motivating force, stimulus, or influence." However, there are other factors that need to be accounted for. There are four factors that play a role in motivation; attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction. Many teachers rely on rewards to motivate their students. The purpose of this brochure is to inform you how to use rewards for positive long-term effects.

Do extrinsic rewards work?

Extrinsic rewards are tangible items (i.e., candy, stickers, etc.). If rewards are not done properly creativity can be inhibited, risk-taking may be discouraged, and intrinsic motivation will be reduced. Here are some examples of how extrinsic rewards can be damaging. In 1961 Louise Brightwell Miller arranged a series of simple drawings of faces so that pairs of nearly identical images would be flashed on a screen. Then she invited 72 nine-year old boys into the laboratory and challenged them to tell the two faces apart. Some of the boys were paid when they succeeded; others were simply told when they were correct. To her surprise, the boys who were trying to earn the reward made a lot more mistakes than the other boys. Janet Spence asked a group of nine year old boys to

remember which of two words were "right" (as arbitrarily determined by the experimenter) and then choose that word over others when it came up again later. Some of the children simply saw a light flash when they chose correctly, while others received M&M's. It turned out that the students who received candy got fewer correct.

How can rewards be used properly? If rewards are implemented appropriately they can be extremely motivating.

- **Examine your own motivation.** Are we ultimately trying to teach a skill, promote a value, boost self esteem, or are we mostly interested in making someone do what we want?
- **Put yourself in the reward recipient's shoes.** Do you feel belittled from this reward?
- **Look at the appropriateness of the reward.** Make sure that the reward is related to the task. For example, if a student is doing a nice job reading then a bookmark may be a meaningful reward.
- **Offer the rewards after the fact, as a surprise.** Do not place too much emphasis on the reward itself. This way the student completes the task for intrinsic reasons and finds the reward less controlling.

Can praise increase motivation?

Praise is not as harmful as other extrinsic motivators. Praise is thought of as less controlling. Something heard has less of a negative impact than something physically received. In addition, praise is less likely to be promised in advanced. For example, a teacher is less likely to say, "do this for a compliment" as often as he/she would say, "do this for a piece of candy."

How can praise be used properly?

- **Do not praise people, only for what they do.** For instance, "that is a really nice story" is better than "you are a good writer."
- **Make praise as specific as possible.** This method pulls the learner into the task. Even better than "that is a really nice story" is "I really liked how the main character is described in your introduction."
- **Avoid phony praise.** When the response is genuine the children sense that the teacher's motive is not to control. It is harmful when the teacher tries to control the behavior of a group of children by creating some suspense about who will be the object of the praise. For example, "I like the way that Joe and Annie are sitting."